

Related Occupations

Recreation workers must exhibit leadership and sensitivity in dealing with people. Other occupations that require similar personal qualities include recreational therapists, social workers, parole officers, human relations counselors, school counselors, clinical and counseling psychologists, and teachers.

Sources of Additional Information

For information on jobs in recreation, contact employers such as local government departments of parks and recreation, nursing and personal care facilities, and YMCAs.

Ordering information for materials describing careers and academic programs in recreation is available from:

☛ National Recreation and Park Association, Division of Professional Services, 22377 Belmont Ridge Road, Ashburn, VA 20148-4501. Internet: <http://www.nrpa.org>

For information on careers in employee services and corporate recreation, contact:

☛ National Employee Services and Recreation Association, 2211 York Rd., Suite 207, Oakbrook, IL 60521. Internet: <http://www.nesra.org>

Social Workers

(O*NET 27305A, 27305B, 27305C, and 27302)

Significant Points

- A bachelor's degree is the minimum requirement for many entry-level jobs, but a master's degree in social work (MSW)—required for clinical practice—or a related field is becoming the norm for many positions.
- Employment is projected to grow much faster than average.
- Competition for jobs is expected to be keen in cities but opportunities should be good in rural areas.

Nature of the Work

Social work is a profession for those with a strong desire to help people, to make things better, and to make a difference. Social workers help people function the best way they can in their environment, deal with their relationships with others, and solve personal and family problems.

Social workers often see clients who face a life-threatening disease or a social problem. These problems may include inadequate housing, unemployment, lack of job skills, financial distress, serious illness or disability, substance abuse, unwanted pregnancy, or antisocial behavior. Social workers also assist families that have serious domestic conflicts, including those involving child or spousal abuse.

Through direct counseling, social workers help clients identify their concerns, consider effective solutions, and find reliable resources. Social workers typically consult and counsel clients and arrange for services that can help them. Often, they refer clients to specialists in services such as debt counseling, childcare or elder care, public assistance, or alcohol or drug rehabilitation. Social workers then follow through with the client to assure that services are helpful and that clients make proper use of the services offered. Social workers may review eligibility requirements, help fill out forms and applications, visit clients on a regular basis, and provide support during crises.

Social workers practice in a variety of settings. In hospitals and psychiatric hospitals, they provide or arrange for a range of support services. In mental health and community centers, social

workers provide counseling services on marriage, family, and adoption matters, and they help people through personal or community emergencies, such as dealing with loss or grief or arranging for disaster assistance. In schools, they help children, parents, and teachers cope with problems. In social service agencies, they help people locate basic benefits, such as income assistance, housing, and job training. Social workers also offer counseling to those receiving therapy for addictive or physical disorders in rehabilitation facilities, and to people in nursing homes in need of routine living care. In employment settings, they counsel people with personal, family, professional, or financial problems affecting their work performance. Social workers who work in courts and correction facilities evaluate and counsel individuals in the criminal justice system to cope better in society. In private practice, they provide clinical or diagnostic testing services covering a wide range of personal disorders.

Social workers often provide social services in health-related settings that now are governed by managed care organizations. To contain costs, these organizations are emphasizing short-term intervention, ambulatory and community-based care, and greater decentralization of services.

Most social workers specialize in an area of practice. Although some conduct research or are involved in planning or policy development, most social workers prefer an area of practice in which they interact with clients.

Clinical social workers offer psychotherapy or counseling and a range of diagnostic services in public agencies, clinics, and private practice.

Child welfare or family services social workers may counsel children and youths who have difficulty adjusting socially, advise parents on how to care for disabled children, or arrange for home-maker services during a parent's illness. If children have serious problems in school, child welfare workers may consult with parents, teachers, and counselors to identify underlying causes and develop plans for treatment. Some social workers assist single parents, arrange adoptions, and help find foster homes for neglected, abandoned, or abused children. Child welfare workers also work in residential institutions for children and adolescents.

Child or adult protective services social workers investigate reports of abuse and neglect and intervene if necessary. They may initiate legal action to remove children from homes and place them temporarily in an emergency shelter or with a foster family.

Mental health social workers provide services for persons with mental or emotional problems. Such services include individual and group therapy, outreach, crisis intervention, social rehabilitation, and training in skills of everyday living. They may also help plan for supportive services to ease patients' return to the community. (Counselors and psychologists, who may provide similar services, are discussed elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Health care social workers help patients and their families cope with chronic, acute, or terminal illnesses and handle problems that may stand in the way of recovery or rehabilitation. They may organize support groups for families of patients suffering from cancer, AIDS, Alzheimer's disease, or other illnesses. They also advise family caregivers, counsel patients, and help plan for their needs after discharge by arranging for at-home services—from meals-on-wheels to oxygen equipment. Some work on interdisciplinary teams that evaluate certain kinds of patients—geriatric or organ transplant patients, for example.

School social workers diagnose students' problems and arrange needed services, counsel children in trouble, and help integrate disabled students into the general school population. School social workers deal with problems such as student pregnancy, misbehavior in class, and excessive absences. They also advise teachers on how to cope with problem students.

Criminal justice social workers make recommendations to courts, prepare pre-sentencing assessments, and provide services to prison inmates and their families. Probation and parole officers

provide similar services to individuals sentenced by a court to parole or probation.

Occupational social workers usually work in a corporation's personnel department or health unit. Through employee assistance programs, they help workers cope with job-related pressures or personal problems that affect the quality of their work. They often offer direct counseling to employees whose performance is hindered by emotional or family problems or substance abuse. They also develop education programs and refer workers to specialized community programs.

Gerontology social workers specialize in services to the aged. They run support groups for family caregivers or for the adult children of aging parents. Also, they advise elderly people or family members about the choices in such areas as housing, transportation, and long-term care; they also coordinate and monitor services.

Social work administrators perform overall management tasks in a hospital, clinic, or other setting that offers social worker services.

Social work planners and policy-makers develop programs to address such issues as child abuse, homelessness, substance abuse, poverty, and violence. These workers research and analyze policies, programs, and regulations. They identify social problems and suggest legislative and other solutions. They may help raise funds or write grants to support these programs.

Working Conditions

Full-time social workers usually work a standard 40-hour week; however, some occasionally work evenings and weekends to meet with clients, attend community meetings, and handle emergencies. Some, particularly in voluntary nonprofit agencies, work part time. Most social workers work in pleasant, clean offices that are well lit and well ventilated. Social workers usually spend most of their time in an office or residential facility, but also may travel locally to visit clients, to meet with service providers, or to attend meetings. Some may use one of several offices within a local area in which to meet with clients. The work, while satisfying, can be emotionally draining. Understaffing and large caseloads add to the pressure in some agencies.



Social workers consult and counsel clients and arrange for services that can help them.

Employment

Social workers held about 604,000 jobs in 1998. About 4 out of 10 jobs were in State, county, or municipal government agencies, primarily in departments of health and human services, mental health, social services, child welfare, housing, education, and corrections. Most private sector jobs were in social service agencies, hospitals, nursing homes, home health agencies, and other health centers or clinics.

Although most social workers are employed in cities or suburbs, some work in rural areas.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

A bachelor's in social work (BSW) degree is the most common minimum requirement to qualify for a job as a social worker; however, majors in psychology, sociology, and related fields may be sufficient to qualify for some entry-level jobs, especially in small community agencies. Although a bachelor's degree is required for entry into the field, an advanced degree has become the standard for many positions. A master's in social work (MSW) is necessary for positions in health and mental health settings and typically is required for certification for clinical work. Jobs in public agencies also may require an advanced degree, such as a master's in social service policy or administration. Supervisory, administrative, and staff training positions usually require at least an advanced degree. College and university teaching positions and most research appointments normally require a doctorate in social work (DSW or Ph.D.).

As of 1999, the Council on Social Work Education accredited over 400 BSW programs and over 125 MSW programs. The Group for Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work listed 63 doctoral programs for Ph.D.'s in social work or DSW's (Doctor of Social Work). BSW programs prepare graduates for direct service positions such as case worker or group worker. They include courses in social work practice, social welfare policies, human behavior and the social environment, social research methods, social work values and ethics, dealing with a culturally diverse clientele, promotion of social and economic justice, and populations-at-risk. Accredited BSW programs require at least 400 hours of supervised field experience.

Master's degree programs prepare graduates for work in their chosen field of concentration and continue to develop their skills to perform clinical assessments, to manage large caseloads, and to explore new ways of drawing upon social services to meet the needs of clients. Master's programs last 2 years and include 900 hours of supervised field instruction, or internship. A part-time program may take 4 years. Entry into a master's program does not require a bachelor's in social work, but courses in psychology, biology, sociology, economics, political science, history, social anthropology, urban studies, and social work are recommended. In addition, a second language can be very helpful. Most master's programs offer advanced standing for those with a bachelor's degree from an accredited social work program.

All States and the District of Columbia have licensing, certification, or registration requirements regarding social work practice and the use of professional titles. Although standards for licensing vary by State, a growing number of States are placing greater emphasis on communications skills, professional ethics, and sensitivity for cultural diversity issues. Additionally, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) offers voluntary credentials. The Academy of Certified Social Workers (ACSW) is granted to all social workers who have met established eligibility criteria. Social workers practicing in school settings may qualify for the School Social Work Specialist (SSWS) credential. Clinical social workers may earn either the Qualified Clinical Social Worker (QCSW) or the advanced credential—Diplomate in Clinical Social Work (DCSW). Social workers holding clinical credentials also may list themselves in the biannual publication of the *NASW Register of Clinical Social Workers*. Credentials are

particularly important for those in private practice; some health insurance providers require them for reimbursement.

Social workers should be emotionally mature, objective, and sensitive to people and their problems. They must be able to handle responsibility, work independently, and maintain good working relationships with clients and coworkers. Volunteer or paid jobs as a social work aide offer ways of testing one's interest in this field.

Advancement to supervisor, program manager, assistant director, or executive director of a social service agency or department is possible, but usually requires an advanced degree and related work experience. Other career options for social workers include teaching, research, and consulting. Some also help formulate government policies by analyzing and advocating policy positions in government agencies, in research institutions, and on legislators' staffs.

Some social workers go into private practice. Most private practitioners are clinical social workers who provide psychotherapy, usually paid through health insurance. Private practitioners usually have at least a master's degree and a period of supervised work experience. A network of contacts for referrals also is essential.

Job Outlook

Employment of social workers is expected to increase much faster than the average for all occupations through 2008. The aged population is increasing rapidly, creating greater demand for health and other social services. Social workers also will be needed to help the sizable baby boom generation deal with depression and mental health concerns stemming from mid-life, career, or other personal and professional difficulties. In addition, continuing concern about crime, juvenile delinquency, and services for the mentally ill, the mentally retarded, AIDS patients, and individuals and families in crisis will spur demand for social workers in several areas of specialization. Many job openings will also stem from the need to replace social workers who leave the occupation.

The number of social workers in hospitals and many larger, long-term care facilities will increase in response to the need to ensure that the necessary medical and social services are in place when individuals leave the facility. However, this service need will be shared across several occupations. In an effort to control costs, these facilities increasingly emphasize discharging patients early, applying an interdisciplinary approach to patient care, and employing a broader mix of occupations—including clinical specialists, registered nurses, and health aides—to tend to patient care or client need.

Social worker employment in home health care services is growing, in part because hospitals are releasing patients earlier than in the past. However, the expanding senior population is an even larger factor. Social workers with backgrounds in gerontology are finding work in the growing numbers of assisted living and senior living communities.

Employment of social workers in private social service agencies will grow, but not as rapidly as demand for their services. Agencies increasingly will restructure services and hire more lower-paid human service workers and assistants instead of social workers. Employment in state and local government may grow somewhat in response to increasing needs for public welfare and family services; however, many of these services will be contracted out to private agencies. Additionally, employment levels may fluctuate depending on need and government funding for various social service programs.

Employment of school social workers is expected to grow, due to expanded efforts to respond to rising rates of teen pregnancy and

to the adjustment problems of immigrants and children from single-parent families. Moreover, continued emphasis on integrating disabled children into the general school population will lead to more jobs. However, availability of State and local funding will dictate the actual job growth in schools.

Opportunities for social workers in private practice will expand because of the anticipated availability of funding from health insurance and public-sector contracts. Also, with increasing affluence, people will be better able to pay for professional help to deal with personal problems. The growing popularity of employee assistance programs also is expected to spur demand for private practitioners, some of whom provide social work services to corporations on a contractual basis.

Competition for social worker jobs is stronger in cities where demand for services often is highest, training programs for social workers are prevalent, and interest in available positions is strongest. However, opportunities should be good in rural areas, which often find it difficult to attract and retain qualified staff.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of social workers were \$30,590 in 1998. The middle 50 percent earned between \$24,160 and \$39,240. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$19,250 and the top 10 percent earned more than \$49,080. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of medical social workers in 1997 were:

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| Home health care services | \$35,800 |
| Offices and clinics of medical doctors | 33,700 |
| Offices of other health care practitioners | 32,900 |
| State government, except education and hospitals | 31,800 |
| Hospitals | 31,500 |

Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of social workers, except medical, in 1997 were:

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| Federal government | \$45,300 |
| Elementary and secondary schools | 34,100 |
| Local government, except education and hospitals | 32,100 |
| Hospitals | 31,300 |
| State government, except education and hospitals | 30,800 |

Related Occupations

Through direct counseling or referral to other services, social workers help people solve a range of personal problems. Workers in occupations with similar duties include the clergy, mental health counselors, counseling psychologists, and human services workers and assistants.

Sources of Additional Information

For information about career opportunities in social work, contact:
 ☛ National Association of Social Workers, Career Information, 750 First St. NE., Suite 700, Washington, DC 20002-4241.

An annual *Directory of Accredited BSW and MSW Programs* is available for a nominal charge from:

☛ Council on Social Work Education, 1700 Duke St., Suite 500, Alexandria, VA 22314-3421. Internet: <http://www.cswe.org>

Information on licensing requirements and testing procedures for each State may be obtained from State licensing authorities, or from:

☛ American Association of State Social Work Boards, 400 South Ridge Parkway, Suite B, Culpeper, VA 22701. Internet: <http://www.aasswb.org>